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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE  
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 USUN NEW YORK 000845

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/19/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [UNSC](#) [RS](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: RUSSIAN PERMREP LINKS ARRIA VISAS TO  
UNOMIG ROLLOVER

REF: USUN 835

Classified By: Ambassador Alex Wolff for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

1.(C) Summary. At the monthly luncheon of Security Council PermReps with the Secretary General on September 18, Russian PermRep Vitaly Churkin drew a direct link between Russian acceptance of a rollover of the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) and U.S. approval of visas for representatives of the de facto Abkhazia and South Ossetia authorities to attend an Arria-format meeting hosted by the Russian Mission with Security Council members on October 7. After the luncheon, PermReps from France, the U.K., Belgium and Italy told Ambassador Wolff they could agree with the Russian proposal and encouraged the United States to accept it as a way to ensure UNOMIG's continuation. Ambassador DiCarlo pulsed DPRs of European Security Council members for more in-depth views, and all echoed a strong desire to ensure the successful rollover of UNOMIG, even if it means accepting an Arria-format meeting. End Summary.

2.(SBU) Ambassador Churkin, speaking on the topic of Georgia at the monthly Security Council luncheon with the Secretary General on September 18, drew a direct link between U.S. visas for representatives of the South Ossetia and Abkhazia de facto authorities to appear at a Russian-hosted Arria-format meeting with the Security Council members on October 7, and Russian acquiescence to a technical rollover of the UNOMIG mandate, which expires on October 15. Churkin raised the issue by first saying he hoped the mandate of UNOMIG SRSG-designate Johan Verbeke would be "in line with agreements on the Russian side", implying that the future UN role would be in keeping with the international discussions called for in point six of the August 12 cease-fire agreement and the follow up plan agreed to on September 8. Referring to the future mission, Churkin said he expected that UNOMIG would have to change its name and other issues would need to be addressed based on the Geneva discussions. He said he also expected the Abkhaz (de facto authorities) would need to be involved directly. He emphasized, however, that "the key to unlocking the door to a UNOMIG rollover is visas for an Arria meeting on October 7."

3.(C) During the luncheon, none of the other members responded to Churkin's comments, but afterward, the PermReps of France, the U.K., Belgium, and Italy told Ambassador Wolff the U.S. should accept the offer. U.K. Ambassador Sawers underscored that an Arria meeting was insignificant, and we should focus on more important issues. Ambassador Wolff pointed out that an appearance by the South Ossetian and Abkhaz representatives in New York would have an important symbolic meaning. He added that we continued to support the Georgians on this point. The Europeans also suggested holding a separate Arria style meeting with representatives from the Abkhazia and South Ossetia IDP groups.

4.(C) At a follow-on meeting hosted by Ambassador DiCarlo with European Security Council DPRs (the U.K. was invited but could not attend), the French and Italians made clear that a

smooth rollover of the UNOMIG mandate was very important to them for three reasons: 1) UNOMIG is the only current international presence in Abkhazia; 2) continuation of the mandate would keep open the possibility of a future increased presence for the UN and the EU; 3) point 2 of the September 8 agreement specifically called for a continuation of the UNOMIG mandate with its current number and deployment blueprint. On the third point especially, the French believe that if one part of the agreement were not implemented, it would set a precedent for not implementing other parts of the agreement.

5.(C) Ambassador DiCarlo pressed the Europeans to hold firm against a potential Russian request to allow representatives of the separatist entities to appear at a formal Council meeting. The French, Italian, and Belgian DPRs hedged on whether their governments would want to allow a formal Council appearance if the Russians made that a condition for their approval of the UNOMIG rollover (assuming no deal on an Arria meeting). France made clear that the continuation of UNOMIG was a priority and thought that Paris would acquiesce to participation, if necessary. The Croatian also was noncommittal, but thought the Geneva process was where the Abkhaz and South Ossetians should participate. He noted, as did Ambassador DiCarlo, that an appearance by South Ossetia and Abkhaz authorities at an Arria meeting could open the door for their appearance at subsequent meetings. The Belgian DPR warned that by pushing hard against an Arria meeting, we risked giving it too much importance.

6.(C) Comment: It is our assessment that the Europeans have already concluded that participation by the Abkhaz and South

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Ossetians in an unofficial Arria format with members of the Council is a small price to pay for a smooth UNOMIG technical rollover. With the Georgians holding the line on this point-- and apparently prepared to lose UNOMIG over it-- we will need to make our own assessment of these tradeoffs, including our view on the utility of UNOMIG. The Department may wish to reinforce our position with European capitals, to counter the trend toward compromise with Russia on this point. Khalilzad